

<https://doi.org/10.59298/NIJLCL/2026/6.1.917>

# Audience Participation Aesthetics: Co-creation, Consent, and Power Dynamics

Nyiramukama Diana Kashaka

Faculty of Education, Kampala International University, Uganda

---

## ABSTRACT

Audience participation aesthetics has transformed contemporary artistic practice by repositioning audiences from passive spectators to active collaborators in the creation, interpretation, and dissemination of artistic experiences. This study examines the interconnected themes of co-creation, consent, and power dynamics within participatory art practices across performance, digital media, interactive art, and community-led cultural projects. Drawing on theories of participatory democracy, collaborative creativity, and socially engaged art, the paper explores how audience participation functions as both an aesthetic strategy and a relational practice that reshapes traditional distinctions between artist and audience. The study analyses co-creation as a collective process involving shared authorship, collaborative decision-making, and experiential engagement, while also interrogating the ethical complexities associated with audience involvement. Particular attention is devoted to consent as an ethical praxis that safeguards participant autonomy, transparency, and the right to withdraw from participatory experiences. Furthermore, the paper critically examines power relations embedded within participatory frameworks, highlighting how institutional authority, artistic control, technological systems, and structural inequalities shape the conditions of participation and the distribution of agency. Through qualitative approaches and case studies drawn from performance art, digital and hybrid platforms, and community-based projects, the study demonstrates that participatory aesthetics can foster inclusion, dialogue, creativity, and community engagement when carefully designed and ethically managed. At the same time, it identifies significant challenges, including tokenistic participation, unequal authority, coerced engagement, and the appropriation of audience contributions. The paper concludes that successful audience participation aesthetics require transparent consent structures, inclusive co-creative methodologies, and reflective attention to power dynamics in order to sustain meaningful collaboration and equitable artistic exchange. Ultimately, audience participation aesthetics emerges not merely as a mode of artistic interaction but as a broader social and ethical framework for collaborative cultural production in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Audience Participation, Co-creation, Consent, Power Dynamics and Participatory Aesthetics.

---

## INTRODUCTION

Participation has evolved from viewing art as mere observation, to now solidifying its presence where art embraces the viewers even deeper than those creating the artwork itself [1]. Yet some components remain questionable; Co-creation, consent and power dynamics among the audience views remain miscalculated in terms of respect and acknowledgement [2]. Aesthetics of audience participation captures and unearths the growing element that consideration of audience co-creation can offer increased relevance to broader audiences since one single spectator does not cover the general idea of participation [1].

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

### Theoretical Foundations of Audience Participation

Audience participation aesthetics occur across myriad art forms and practices, including participatory performance art, audience-directed digital cinema, and socially engaged art. Such practices offer both artists and audiences opportunities to develop co-creative works [1]. Since co-creation entails aesthetic and social risk, it is prudent to safeguard participant well-being. Examination of co-creation, consent, and power dynamics based on the principles of creative practice and participatory democracy clarifies their significance, supports ethical decision-making, and helps reduce potential harm [2]. Co-creation is a process whereby multiple individuals shape the development of a creative work, resulting in a meaningful and engaging experience [2]. At its most extensive, co-creation encompasses authorship by an audience, distinguishing the experience from a simple act of participation. Contemporary participatory, experimental, and interactive, performance, media, and visual arts frequently enlist audiences as co-creators [3]. Performers, film directors, or visual artists interact with audiences and the public, facilitating co-creation, and allowing the audience to engage with the work as creators [3]. The principle of consent promotes ethical practice in participatory art. Consent reflects the desire for and co-created agreement to take part in an activity [1]. In participatory arts, audience members frequently co-create work alongside artists, directing the process and making aesthetic decisions about the development of the work-in-progress. Coconstruction, once an apprenticeship, is now widespread across community-engaged projects, interactive media, participatory performance, and participatory design formats [2]. Consideration of the principle becomes even more pertinent when the influence is pronounced and the aesthetic risk substantial [3]. Power dynamics underpin co-creation schemas, comedic and dramatic performance, hybrid and cross-genre interactive cinema, visual media, video creation, participatory design, and community arts. The formal and informal capacity of many arts practitioners to address power dynamics and other social barriers through participatory art is well recognized [4]. Participation in participatory arts is sensitive to social divisions. The tension between the role of spectator and participant contextualises traditional and contemporary participatory art and the desire for aesthetic agency. Especially in participatory environments, the ability to consider formative elements of the creative work weighs against democratised expressions influenced by historical precedents or existing methods [2]. In non-institutional or independent fields, safeguard observation relates not only to discerning audience engagement but also to the influence of artistic agency on the creative practice [1].

### Co-creation in Creative Practice

Audience participation arts invite various forms of audience involvement and contributions to different artistic disciplines [1]. These audience contributions can be conceptualized as co-creation where audience participation becomes intertwined with the artist's intentions and practices [2]. Artistic co-creation can occur at both performance and interdisciplinary levels, and has been the focus of at least three distinct strands of participatory, social, and community-engaged art over the past two decades, still considered marginal [3]. Participation emerges not only as a division of professional practice and time but also as an introduction to participatory arts, now referenced more frequently in leading journals. Community-driven events that may be termed 'cultural democracy' or 'community cultural development' still occur and contribute to shaping practice but operate at a different level of artistic activity with a specific focus [4]. Well-documented accounts of practice that focus thematically on co-creation appear to remain limited and therefore warrant further analysis [3]. Co-creation is defined generally as a collective practice of making or doing with others extending through all forming engaged practice, and is frequently presented in both live and digital forms, as well as hybrid combinations of the two. Illustrative practice materials and contemporary forms of culture are included as opportunities for developing and sharing interrogation, reflection, and alongside co-creation [4]. Theoretical concepts of co-creation frequently reflect collaborative investigations. Active participation in a collaborative exchange can include guidance from a professional artist but nevertheless constitutes an engagement with significant levels of autonomy and independence on the contributors' part. Thematic focus upon co-creation as co-making, co-performing, co-authorship, collective authorship, inter-authorship, collective creation, and co-design emerges across the literature, underpinned at times by references to recognised conceptual, intellectual, and performative strategies. Definitions accompany co-creation practices [3]. Participatory and socially engaged art is frequently seen as a dominant field of finely articulated practice working through thematic, project, and stylistic sequences that explore co-creation. Contemporary language addresses unequal distribution of agency and a normative address to the open opportunity rather than a mere provision of choice, agency, empowerment, or collaboration. Emphasis upon inter-agential agency speaks to co-creation across all outlines and practice forms [4]. Contemporary descriptions of co-creation operate similarly as a practice insight within audience research. Operative terms, such as 'exchange,' 'share,' and 'experience' have gained traction in both participatory and audience research discourses [4].

### **Consent as Ethical Praxis**

As tangible manifestations of a voluntarist and pessimistic politics, audiences shifted focus to consent during mass participatory performance events ranging from sleepovers to durational movement theatre [3]. Consent operates as an approach to audience involvement wherein participant-spectators retain control over the terms on which they enter the event, acquire an understanding of their involvement from outset, secure the means to disengage, and possess the ability to act as conduits for autonomy, vagueness, doubt, misinformation, or emotions in ways that best suit their artistic objectives [5]. Within the spectrum of input, influence, visitation, co-creation, and interactive dramaturgy, consent as ethical praxis emerges as a clear trans-audience strategy. It necessitates comprehension of one's own boundaries regarding input and the extent to which one is amenable to becoming a co-creator, a performer taking part in the event, or neither; this self-awareness is made all the more significant when determining whether to contribute only as an audience member and to what level of inclination to act in gathering data conceived of as such representation [2, 1].

### **Power Dynamics and Audience Roles**

Audience participation impacts both the form and content of the shared experience [5] and involves a co-creative agreement or contract between audiences and practitioners [1]. Interactive arts and digital-media practices often create varied systems of participation and audience involvement [2]. The concept of participatory culture offers the potential to examine the boundaries or borders of practices that allow community involvement; how participants engage with each other and the information; and whether the framework provides a clear and constructive model of engagement for participants [3, 4].

### **Methodologies for Studying Participation Aesthetics**

Aesthetic modes in which audiences co-create content within, alongside, and beyond works broaden participation, yet complicate models of co-creation that emphasize artistic concept over audience role [5]. Systematic investigations of co-creation remain scarce. Framing consent in artistic practice as ethical praxis focused on values, principles, and procedures enables ethical assessment of co-creative projects and attention to consent artifacts within the structure of consent [6]. Absence of explicit consent parameters does not negate consent; rather, consent involves an implicit negotiation of rules and conventions often shaped by power and authority. Understanding these dynamics is critical in participation-oriented work [7]. An increasingly broad spectrum of cultural experiences enriches contemporary practice and warrants investigation [2].

### **Qualitative Approaches to Co-creation**

The desire to involve audiences in co-creative, participatory, and collaborative experiences is widespread across arts sectors. Recent works reaching beyond artists, designers, or communities of interest seek to engage audiences in other ways [8]. This raises questions about the potential impact of limited audience involvement on aesthetic or experiential outcomes. New tools further challenge preconceptions of audience participation, prompting studies to better understand the implications of, rather than merely the practices bordering or enabling, audience participation [9]. To ground such inquiries, the artistic and experiential value of audience participation must be clarified. Though scholars have long debated the nature of art, Giovanni Sartori's definition of research, a means for humans to learn one thing from another provides a practical, objective definition [6]. Participation thus qualifies as a co-creative practice [10]. Applicable across a range of mediums, disciplines, and venues, co-creation entails multiple practices involving one or several creators and an audience who collectively shape an artistic, interactive, or experiential proposition [11]. Wide-ranging and properly underexplored, there exist numerous approaches to audience participation under the banner of co-creation, from more open-ended methodologies yielding greater autonomy for participants to more structured frameworks resulting in more limited scope for audience agency [2]. This spectrum also opens avenues for a clearer understanding of audience participation, its advantages, obstacles, and associated impacts on the aesthetic or experiential propositions artists similarly seek to clarify [3].

### **Ethical Frameworks for Consent**

In participatory projects, consent is a complex topic. Rather than simply collecting and documenting consent, there is potential to explore this concept in depth [6]. The Machinery of Consent framework invites structured reflection on various dimensions of consent, indicating options for negotiation and choices available to participants throughout the process [7]. In line with a broader rationale around power dynamics, consent drawn from individual or collective beginnings and in contrast to pre-designated approaches becomes a means for sharing authority, knowledge and responsibility within a participatory system [2].

### **Analyzing Power Relations in Participation**

Power relations shape how participatory opportunities are framed and ultimately adopted. Participation can easily become a perfunctory exercise, localized mutterings at best signifying little more than conventional engagement in marketing-speak [7]. Audience members may be asked to contribute their opinions, suggestions, or votes during events; without clarifying how this input will inform the ongoing practice, such efforts risk appearing tokenistic,

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

limited to a narrow spectrum of predefined options, restricted to certain periods of open comment, or ultimately neglected [8]. Conventional survey mechanisms, especially when deployed before or during an experience, can further underscore the already transient quality of such efforts. Content that doesn't intend, solicit, or allow for subsequent adjustment may preempt even the semblance of an open feedback loop [8]. These dynamics, together with technological systems primarily designed for unidirectional distribution, can reinforce spatial, or group-wide, boundaries seemingly informed more by agency or data-collection efficiency than by egalitarian open-endedness. Ad-hoc interventions like in situ voting schemes if integrated at all often serve as cursory gauges of community sentiment rather than integral constituents of the collaborative process or framework [8]. Within participatory cultural enterprises, those positioned to structure, direct, or govern participation fundamentally shape the sphere in which such input occurs [9]. The principal architect of a project alone, designed by others, or through formally designated intermediaries implicitly assumes a dominant role in the arrangement of participatory spaces themselves [9]. Designers might be invited to integrate social-media tools, sentiment trackers, postmortem probes, participatory budgeting portals, cohort-assessment assessments, or other elements, yet these tasks seldom confer comparable influence over societal conditions or experiential qualities themselves, a fundamental orientation imprinted early in the encounter [9]. Expanded examination of institutional power practices, conceived not merely as authorities but also as broader thematic trajectories or phenomena, enables corresponding inquiries into the avenues available for alternative contributions, the significance of such channels, and the circumstances that compel them [10]. Vocabularies of listening, engagement, or direction might suggest collective more than individual authorship; however, it remains incumbent upon any such entity from the outset to announce or determine the character, dimensions, duration, and participants of the experience itself, thus maintaining a clear distinction [8, 2].

### Case Studies in Co-creative Experiences

There is growing interest among practitioners and researchers in the potential of co-creative experiences to engage or involve audiences as active collaborators rather than as passive spectators [2]. Co-creation is attracting increasing scholarly attention as a key concept in the transition from audiences of viewers to participants, who directly collaborate with creators in the planning or development of art and technology. This reflects a trend toward participatory practices in which audiences no longer function as a mere passive consumer of finished artistic objects or work [1]. In the theoretical framework, the case studies are grouped into three broad categories: performance and interactive art, digital and hybrid platforms, as well as community-led cultural projects. These categories illustrate how co-creative experiences can engage audiences in creative and collaborative ways across diverse forms of practice [11]. Collectively, they show the potential of co-creative experiences to invite creative contributions from audiences in participatory processes, allowing practical and theoretical frameworks delineating co-creation to be explored in more depth than would be possible with singular case studies [12].

### Performance and Interactive Art

Performance art and interactive art have emerged as two prominent forms that blur boundaries between artists and audiences [13]. These practices encourage viewer input that informs aspects of the work as it unfolds, thus allowing audiences to actively shape its content and direction [14]. The forms take on various guises including talk shows, live cinema, workshops, pet performances, online events, summer camps, and karaoke parties [1]. The increasing range of these practices warrants an examination of their shared characteristics, a need underscored by the growing number of live and online events that call for audience participation and input [15]. Participation becomes a means of co-creation, as in works created by artists Guillermo Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra, or a condition imposed upon audiences, shaping the nature of their relationship with the work and its makers, the interplay among co-creation, consent, and power dynamics remains central to an understanding of these practices [9, 16].

### Digital and Hybrid Platforms

Diverse digital and hybrid platforms play an important role in contemporary interactive-creative processes. Their combination of immaterial creation and material reproduction systems creates a non-linear approach to the co-creation of knowledge and culture [7]. Users who share digital records of their performances, actions, ideas, or questions on large-scale social networks, video sites, and still-image platforms have a much lower co-creative input than those who adopt more niche solutions [8]. These broader platforms support a greater audience capacity for the dissemination of knowledge, widespread observation of the outcomes, and the collection of points of view in the public domain [9]. Participants respond to the appropriated content, enabling them to reach out to individual contributors, disentangle the focal concerns driving the original performance, and interconnect similar initiatives across the globe. Audience and performer activities shift into a different paradigm: algorithmically generated options favour connecting along topical lines, users contribute back proactively, and neighbouring interactions result in formative transformations of people and environments [10]. Some platforms follow a trans-medial, cross-platform, trans-functional, or bio-cultural flow, which retains both spatial and temporal features and is emblematic of a digital-oriented audience that grasps a more playful notion of time and motion [11]. The fate of desired pieces wrangled

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

into an institution by participants shifting between “audience” and “creator” status rather than occupying a privileged position outside the field altogether depends on the actively appropriated materials at any given moment. [10] Appropriating material from widely recognizable simulacra or other transgenic hybrid performance systems encourages contributors to generate recordings, logs, playbacks, annotations, and other indicative traces, which can frequently and conveniently point back to the work that prompted participation in the first place [11]. Such movement sets off a biotransformation, clarifies material imperfections, plants focused or dispersed echoes, and plays with saturation, noise, gravity, texture, and mapping among other articulations. An intermediate scale of performance emerges in the context of the general exchange of publicly accessible, easily replicable, and already reconstructed pieces or systems, when participants play back or perform on a work already in circulation [12]. Self-generated questions and intentions serve as productive activators for a temporary audience situation, even when the corresponding target is absent. Such preparatory activators nonetheless pertain to a specific field and bring with them the guise of other contemporaneous conventions [13]. At this stage, audience and performer practices blur into intensified analogue and digital exchanges, which again enable a transitioning of the performative attention cycle that involves inclusion, intervention, appropriation, and deselection [5].

#### **Community-Led Cultural Projects**

Cultural organisations frequently aspire to serve as catalysts for meaning-making and community cohesion while also seeking to bolster regional economic development [10]. These objectives have led heritage professionals to launch participation initiatives, which they promote as community-engagement strategies and forms of democratic art. Such initiatives move beyond merely broadening participation to stimulating collective ownership of cultural offerings [11]. By blurring distinctions between artist and audience, artefact and curator, and public and private, they aim to empower participants and elevate their sense of agency, fostering dialogue around themes of social and personal import [12]. Situating community-led cultural projects in a historical context reveals both similarities with traditional practices and emerging forms of co-creation in art theory and practice today. Artists in various fields have long foregrounded audience input to shape shared projects; yet the concept of authorship, once more prominent, remained individualistic [13]. Currently, artists, repositories of distinct expertise, relinquish the choice of materials for collaborative subject matters that resonate with community concerns and aspirations. By allowing individuals and groups to select thematic avenues for exploration and initiative development, artists reframe their role, honouring participatory contributions while addressing the practical agency of time, energy, and resources [4]. The early-20th-century community-art movement exemplifies this artform’s concern for mutual exploration within collective practical circumstances, reflecting awareness of community and agency among collaborative contributors [14]. Re-engaging community-led projects through the lens of contemporary theories and practices of co-creation uncovers parallels not only with traditional practices emphasising both community and agency but also with contemporary formulation [15]. Both movements frame communal input as the foundation for collaborative, participatory exploration among community-led initiatives while acknowledging the residual artistic practice that remains part of both processes. The gap separating the previously dominant model of ‘community art’, which placed community and agency firmly within the realm of audience/collaborator, has become narrower [16].

#### **Implications for Practice**

Audience participation aesthetics are employed with a focus on audience co-creation of experiences. Co-creation must be approached flexibly, taking into account the medium, design, and intended nomination of the audience [5]. Co-creation should be understood within the context of co-creative experiences that allow an audience to develop shared thoughts and ideas regarding an object or theme of interest. Co-creation can be perceived as parallel to experiential learning. Experiential learning occurs when direct experience is combined with reflection [4]. Consequently, transmission-related experiences can be audited for their experiential and co-creative qualities. Co-creative enquiry, where the audience engages in investigation rather than creation, engages with the artwork [5]. Establishing transparent consent protocols, both in terms of the distribution of the information and the visibility of the protocols themselves, strengthen the ethical standing of an activity. Audiences engaging with an artwork are agents, and any material directed towards them often has limited or no lasting influence within the framework of the work unless consent is explicitly secured [6]. While transactional analysis remains an important conceptual framework for understanding phenomena such as constructive participation and consent, this level of analysis regularly abstracts the relational dimension of participation. A supplementary framework focussing on the relations established within participation emphasises the importance of acknowledging the differentiated positions occupied by participants both prior to and through engagement in an activity [10]. Within both frameworks, understanding the transfer of agency through collaboration continues to provide insight, but the investigation of other elements including differential designation of making, the multiplicity of concurrent transformations, and elements intrinsic to the audience, can produce important learnings [2]. By remaining attentive to these dynamics, practitioners can navigate the multidimensional relations present in situations that encompass co-creation, consent, and participation

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

[4]. The practice of audience participation aesthetics should be directed towards deepening the audience's appreciation of the commentary that they produce rather than establishing the orthodoxy of any particular point of view [3]. As a result, the aim is to produce commentary that promotes investigation without imposing a singular narrative or proscribing a range of alternative responses. Institutions or practitioners exploring participatory experience through co-creation, often in the sectors of art, culture, and heritage may wish to engage with the evaluation of participatory experience yet feel uncertain about how to approach this task [4]. Co-creative practices may not be universally deemed valuable or warranted, and attention to co-creative enquiry may be equally relevant. The continued scrutiny of relationships connected with participation such as the audience's concurrent process of construction, enables further questions to emerge [5].

#### **Designing for Inclusive Co-creation**

Collaborative co-creation means joint decision-making with people, but non-inclusivity can emerge even when inviting diverse participants. Before approaching a community for participation, careful research on the community's interests becomes crucial, devising co-design activities that best address those interests [6]. In an art-based urban development project with a diverse neighbourhood, design students did extensive research and developed multiple activities like a mobile exhibition and a mapping activity [7]. Consequently, the neighbourhood enacted a planning initiative that helped to transform the area [2]. An inclusive design approach combines a posture of listening during planning with an active-state maker role [11].

#### **Establishing Transparent Consent Protocols**

Transparency enhances audience autonomy in co-created experiences, yet implementing this principle when sharing personal stories and media is complex. Employing a tiered consent model [12] can clarify participants' choices regarding the sharing of audiovisual material. This model establishes different levels of consent corresponding to varying public exposure (e.g., private versus social media sharing). When levels have been mutually agreed upon, participants receive reminders prior to any scheduled dissemination [13]. Time-sensitive advisories about impending or live sharing support ongoing consent and help avoid interruptions during the performance [13].

#### **Navigating Power Dynamics in Collaborative Settings**

Collective practices decentralized the locational aspects of cultural activity centered in gallery spaces, taking instead formal discussion and exhibition into public space. Collaboration with community centres, the Portage Building, and cultural programs at the University of Guelph catalyzed participatory projects articulated around the themes of housing and homelessness, women, and youth [10]. Performance, theatrical devising, installation, and multimedia art environments yielded new protocols that enhanced scholarship in public service and involvement in participatory activity. However, broader participation frameworks were deployed that responded to larger questions of civic engagement than those defined by venue partnership [2]. Public art-publishing through York University and subsequent dialogue on the future of public space in communities with diverse and marginalized populations further situated concerns of representation and institutional practice within a set of political and economic questions framing public action and co-creation [1]. With these extended relational frameworks in mind, more acute attention was devoted to the personal and institutional circulation of art within collaborative co-creation, interactive performance, and audience-driven activity [3].

#### **Measurement and Evaluation**

To determine whether participatory approaches are adequately performed, co-creation can be monitored and measured over time. In the rating method, specific and clear co-creation parameters are demarcated according to the universe of discourse [11]. At the beginning of an event, they are rated 1 through 3, and, at its closing, they are rated 1 through [6]. The measurement is illustrated in a matrix where the events rise in either a left or right direction. The artistic intent of a participation-based work can be effective when evaluating a gallery or participatory performance. Audience engagement in a participatory event is watched over time either by mapping or video recording. The records chart what the audience interacts with and how. In creative co-working with the audience, significant attention is paid to how the audience-participants' decisions circulate and which text becomes a gift towards a wider detail [4].

#### **Indicators of Successful Co-creation**

Audience participation aesthetics should be examined through an objective, evidence-based lens, grounding claims in relevant theories, data, and ethical considerations [5]. The literature on co-creation discusses numerous indicators for evaluating participation, although empirical studies of co-creation remain scarce [5]. Audiovisual works addressing creative practice frequently cite viewer agency, audience activity, and contextual awareness among the major factors influencing ecological engagement [6]. These concepts also resonate within the field of audience participation, since participants often shape a creative practice while the activity itself becomes the primary focus. Whatever the exact criteria, establishing specific indicators for success enables artistic practitioners to reflect with greater clarity on the nature of participation offered through their own work [7]. Two participatory and two

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

aesthetic indicators have emerged for measuring the perceived success of co-creation. The former include the adoption of creative roles by participants and the extent of shared authorship, since audience contributions can vary substantially [8]. Audience members may fulfil diverse roles within a participatory context, such as performer, co-creator, or merely observer, and the adoption of more active roles generally correlates with higher engagement levels [9]. Overall, explicit degrees of audience invitation, involvement, and co-creational engagement potentially indicate a co-creating practice [14]. These criteria, however, operate largely on a qualitative basis, thus requiring further inquiry in the context of participatory aesthetics [15]. Aesthetic indicators addressing perceived susceptibility to the welcome or unwanted capture of resources offer a different perspective. In a completely open creative setting, audience members may abstain from contributing for fear that their offerings will be inappropriately appropriated, thus diminishing their overall engagement with the practice [16]. Resources may encompass time, knowledge, creativity, and attention, which demand varying degrees of personal investment yet remain susceptible to misappropriation [2]. Lowered levels of perceived capture and a corresponding increase in resource-sharing indicate a more open practice overall [1]. These aesthetic parameters may complement other aspects of audience participation and attend to co-creation in further detail.

#### **Assessing Ethical Compliance and Consent**

Consent is paramount in co-creative settings [7]. Research has shown that establishing appropriate protocols increases the likelihood of receiving ethical approval [15]. The evolving landscape of audience participation prompts critical dialogue on the nature of consent and which actions demand approval; permanent installations typically do not require further consent [16]. Developers and audience members should examine collaborative projects to determine the necessity and intensity of consent protocols [14].

#### **Tools for Reflective Practice**

Reflective practices for assessing audience participation should prompt artists to evaluate three key aspects of their work: the intentions guiding their co-creative processes, the degree to which their artistic vision actually informs and shapes these processes, and the extent to which their co-creative practice engages with questions related to power dynamics or the balance of artistic, institutional, and audience agency [15]. Tools designed for this purpose can deepen critical reflection by providing a more systematic means of examining artistic practice [4].

#### **Challenges and Limitations**

Audience participation in creative practice encourages the co-creation of value through the joint efforts of artists and audiences. While empowering for both parties, this practice complicates the creative enterprise, sometimes beyond the original intent [14]. Forced or reluctant participation diminishes value and enjoyment. Co-creation should therefore not be imposed but rather developed alongside consent and power awareness [2]. Theoretical principles of co-creation, consent, and power embody the philosophical foundation of participation aesthetics [1] and provide a valid framework for investigating and observing participatory practices in diverse contexts [15]. Grounding audience participation within co-creation expands its applicability beyond the arts into research, community engagement, business, and technology [16].

#### **CONCLUSION**

Audience participation aesthetics represents a significant transformation in contemporary creative practice, redefining the relationship between artists, institutions, and audiences. Rather than positioning audiences as passive recipients of completed artistic works, participatory aesthetics recognizes them as active contributors whose engagement shapes the meaning, direction, and outcomes of artistic experiences. This study has demonstrated that co-creation, consent, and power dynamics form the foundational pillars through which participatory practices can be understood, evaluated, and ethically sustained. The analysis reveals that co-creation extends beyond simple interaction or audience involvement to encompass shared authorship, collaborative meaning-making and collective experiential engagement. Across performance art, digital media, hybrid platforms, and community-led cultural projects, participatory practices create opportunities for audiences to contribute creatively, negotiate artistic experiences, and influence aesthetic outcomes. These practices foster dialogue, inclusivity, and experiential learning while also challenging traditional hierarchies between creators and spectators. At the same time, the study highlights the ethical complexities embedded within participatory frameworks. Consent emerges as a critical ethical praxis that ensures participants maintain autonomy, informed understanding, and the freedom to withdraw from engagement. Transparent consent protocols, tiered participation structures, and ongoing communication are essential to protecting audience agency and reducing potential harm. In participatory contexts where emotional, social, or creative risks are involved, ethical safeguards become indispensable for sustaining trust and meaningful collaboration. Equally important are the power dynamics that structure participation. Although participatory art frequently presents itself as democratic and inclusive, authority often remains unevenly distributed among artists, institutions, technological systems, and audiences. Without careful reflection, participation may become tokenistic, reinforcing existing hierarchies rather than dismantling them. The study therefore emphasizes the need for

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

practitioners to critically assess how participatory opportunities are designed, who controls decision-making processes, and how audience contributions are valued and integrated into the creative work. The examination of case studies demonstrates that participatory aesthetics can generate transformative cultural experiences when grounded in inclusivity, reflexivity, and ethical awareness. Community-led projects, interactive performances, and digital co-creative environments show the capacity of participatory practices to strengthen social cohesion, encourage collective expression, and expand cultural accessibility. However, these benefits are most sustainable when participation remains voluntary, transparent, and responsive to the diverse experiences and positions of participants. Ultimately, audience participation aesthetics should not be understood merely as a stylistic trend in contemporary art but as a broader framework for collaborative cultural engagement. Future artistic, institutional, and scholarly practices must continue to explore methods for balancing creative freedom with ethical responsibility, expanding inclusive participation while addressing inequalities of power and representation. By fostering meaningful co-creation grounded in consent and mutual respect, participatory aesthetics holds the potential to deepen artistic engagement, democratize cultural production, and reshape the social role of art in contemporary society.

#### REFERENCES

1. Jordan K. On the border of participation: spectatorship and the “interactive rituals” of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra. *Participations*. 2015;12(1):214-32.
2. Misra S. The fight for voice: exploring conflict and participation in Hamilton’s neighbourhood action strategy [master’s thesis]. Hamilton: McMaster University; 2018.
3. Fremantle C, Harris P. Practising equality: issues for co-creative and participatory practices addressing social justice and equality. *Participations J Audience Recept Stud*. 2013;10(1):352-77.
4. Rooke A. Curating community? The relational and agonistic value of participatory arts in superdiverse localities. *J Arts Communities*. 2014;6(1):25-43.
5. Blázquez JM. Participatory worlds: models of collaborative textual production beyond the entertainment industry. *Int J Commun*. 2016;10:4238-57.
6. Nicholas G, Foote J, Kainz K, Midgley G, et al. Towards a heart and soul for co-creative research practice: a systemic approach. *Evid Policy*. 2019;15(3):353-70.
7. Rivas Velarde MC, Tsantoulis P, Burton-Jeangros C, Aceti M, et al. Citizens’ views on sharing their health data: the role of competence, reliability and pursuing the common good. *J Med Ethics*. 2021;47(11):721-27.
8. Fritz L, Binder CR. Participation as relational space: a critical approach to analysing participation in sustainability research. *Sustain Sci*. 2020;15(3):807-19.
9. Her JJ, Hamlyn J. Meaningful engagement: computer-based interactive media art in public space. *Int J Arts Technol*. 2010;3(2-3):226-42.
10. Malpass A, Breel A, Stubbs J, Stevens T, et al. Create to collaborate: using creative activity and participatory performance in online workshops to build collaborative research relationships. *Res Involv Engagem*. 2023;9(1):41.
11. Hödl O, Kayali F, Fitzpatrick G, Holland S. TMAP design cards for technology-mediated audience participation in live music. *Proc ACM Hum Comput Interact*. 2019;3(CSCW):1-23.
12. Nissen B, Neumann V, Mikusz A, Gianni R, et al. Should I agree? Delegating consent decisions beyond the individual. *Ethics Inf Technol*. 2019;21(3):189-201.
13. Chowdhary S, Kawakami A, Gray ML, Suh J, et al. Can workers meaningfully consent to workplace wellbeing technologies? *Proc ACM Hum Comput Interact*. 2023;7(CSCW2):1-29.
14. Greenhalgh T, Jackson C, Shaw S, Janamian T. Achieving research impact through co-creation in community-based health services: literature review and case study. *Milbank Q*. 2016;94(2):392-429.
15. Goodyear-Smith F, Jackson C, Greenhalgh T. Co-design and implementation research: challenges and solutions for ethics committees. *BMC Med Ethics*. 2015;16:78.
16. Brueggemann MJ, Strohmayr A, Marshall M, Birbeck N, et al. Reflexive practices for the future of design education: an exercise in ethno-empathy. *Des J*. 2017;20(Suppl 1):S4146-58.

**CITE AS: Nyiramukama Diana Kashaka (2026). Audience Participation Aesthetics: Co-creation, Consent, and Power Dynamics. NEWPORT INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW, COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGES 6(1):9-17. <https://doi.org/10.59298/NIJLCL/2026/6.1.917>**